

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Food Wastage

Shahin-ur Rahman

A hungry man is an angry man; every human being is entitled to food and drink. Allāh ﷻ has taken the responsibility to provide for each and every creature on the planet. He mentions:

﴿ وَمَا مِنْ دَابَّةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ إِلَّا عَلَى اللَّهِ رِزْقُهَا ﴾

“There is no creature on Earth whose sustenance is not undertaken by Allāh.”⁽¹⁾

Not only is this promise true throughout the year, but man is given an increased dosage of *barakah* in the month of Ramaḍān. Allāh ﷻ has said in the Qur’ān, the fasting of Ramaḍān has been ordained upon us primarily to obtain *Taqwā*. He says:

﴿ يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ ﴿۱۸۷﴾ ﴾

“O you who believe, the fasts have been enjoined upon you as they were enjoined upon those before you, so that you may be God-fearing.”⁽²⁾

Taqwā can only be acquired through adherence to the teachings of Allāh ﷻ. In another āyah, Allāh ﷻ remarks about the People of the Book:

﴿ وَلَوْ أَنَّهُمْ أَقَامُوا التَّوْرَةَ وَالْإِنْجِيلَ وَمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْهِمْ مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ لَأَكَلُوا مِن فَوْقِهِمْ وَمِن تَحْتِ أَرْجُلِهِمْ ﴾

“If they had upheld the Tawrah, the Injil and what had been sent down to them from their Lord, they would surely have had plenty to eat from above them and from beneath them.”⁽³⁾

Keeping this in mind, Ramaḍān is a month wherein the Muslims increase their connection with the Holy Qur’ān; therefore, Allāh ﷻ amplifies their sustenance and blesses them with varieties of foods, which they do not tend to eat in the other months. There is no need to provide proof for this self-evident fact.

However, true thankfulness to Allāh ﷻ is to welcome this gift, but not misuse it. Islām advocates moderation. To keep a balance, the following āyah must be embodied:

﴿ وَكُلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا وَلَا تُسْرِفُوا إِنَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُسْرِفِينَ ﴿۳۱﴾ ﴾

⁽¹⁾ [Hūd: 11/6].

⁽²⁾ [Al-Baqarah: 2/183].

⁽³⁾ [Al-Mā'idah: 5/66].

“Eat and drink, and do not be extravagant. Surely, Allāh does not like the extravagant.”⁽⁴⁾

Unfortunately, the abundant favours of Allāh ﷻ are taken for granted. In the UK alone, an estimated 15 million tonnes of food and drink are wasted on an annual basis, over half of which is avoidable. Hotels, pubs and restaurants wasted a total of 600 thousand tonnes of food in 2009, of which 40 thousand tonnes could have been avoided.⁽⁵⁾

This is just in the UK. According to the United Nations Environment Programme, the USA alone throws away \$48.3 billion worth of food each year. It is estimated that half of the water used to produce this food also goes to waste. Not only that, but roughly one third of the food produced in the world for human consumption – approximately 1.3 billion tonnes – gets lost or wasted every year.⁽⁶⁾

The 1.3 billion tonnes of wasted would be enough to feed all the hungry people in the world four times. On the one hand, nearly 1 billion people are hungry worldwide; on the other hand, around 1.5 billion people in the world are overweight, while 400 million are obese.⁽⁷⁾

This is against what the Prophet ﷺ had taught. In fact, the emergence of obesity in the later times is a prophecy he ﷺ had predicted.⁽⁸⁾ The Prophet ﷺ did not only teach against over-eating; he also taught the believers to eat less than a full stomach:

« ما ملأ آدمي وعاء شراً من بطن . بحسب ابن آدم أكلات يُقْمَن صُلْبُه ؛ فإن كان لا محالة ،
فتلث ل طعامه ، وتلث لشرا به ، وتلث لنفسه . »

“The son of Ādam does not fill a worse container than the stomach. A few bites to keep his back straight should suffice the son of Ādam; if this is not possible, [then he may fill] one third [of his stomach] for his food, another third for his drink and a final third for his breathing.”⁽⁹⁾

The above ḥadīth is concerning every human being. When comparing the believer’s diet to the disbeliever’s, the Prophet ﷺ said:

« المؤمنُ يأكل في معي واحد ، والكافر يأكل في سبعة أمعاء . »

(4) [Al-A’rāf: 7/31].

(5) https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/315418/foodpoCKETbook-2013update-29may14.pdf p. 40. Accessed on 15th June 2015.

(6) <http://www.unep.org/wed/2013/quickfacts/> accessed on 15th June 2015. Other sources suggest USA throws away \$165 billion worth of food every year.

(7) <http://saynotofoodwaste.org/data/facts/> accessed on 15th June 2015.

(8) To read about Islām’s view on obesity, visit <http://ahlussunnah.boards.net/thread/152/obesity-another-prophecy-prophet> for a brief insight.

(9) Al-Tirmidhī (2380).

“The believer eats in one stomach, and the disbeliever eats in seven stomachs.”⁽¹⁰⁾

Avoiding wastage and extravagance is not a command restricted to food; rather, it is a broad concept. The Prophet ﷺ even forbade the believers from using excessive water during *Wuḍū’*. A bedouin once came to the Prophet ﷺ and asked about *Wuḍū’*. After having shown him how to perform *Wuḍū’* by washing each limb three times, the Prophet ﷺ said:

« فَمَنْ زَادَ عَلَى هَذَا ، فَقَدْ أَسَاءَ وَتَعَدَّى وَظَلَمَ . »

“Whosoever does more than this has done evil, transgressed and wronged.”⁽¹¹⁾

Therefore, the Muslim should be efficient with the blessings of Allāh ﷻ upon him, i.e. achieve maximum productivity with minimum wastage. Although it is something to keep in mind throughout the year, we are even more in need of such reminders during the month of Ramaḍān, wherein our situation with regard to food wastage is utterly embarrassing.

This does not mean we should become stingy in this blessed month. The Prophet ﷺ was the most generous of people, and his generosity would increase in the month of Ramaḍān.⁽¹²⁾ While optimising the countless blessings of Allāh ﷻ upon us, we must avoid becoming the friends of the Shayṭāns. Allāh ﷻ says:

﴿ وَلَا تُبْذِرْ تَبْذِيرًا ۚ إِنَّ الْمُبْذِرِينَ كَانُوا إِخْوَانَ الشَّيْطَانِ ۗ وَكَانَ الشَّيْطَانُ لِرَبِّهِ كَفُورًا ۖ ﴾

“And do not squander recklessly. Surely, squanderers are the brothers of Shayṭāns, and the Shayṭān is very ungrateful to his Lord.”⁽¹³⁾

May Allāh ﷻ enable us to keep the perfect balance – during the month of Ramaḍān and outside it - in optimising His favours, while avoiding all types of extravagance and wastage. Āmīn.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Al-Bukhārī (5393) and Muslim (2060).

⁽¹¹⁾ Al-Nasā’ī (140) and Ibn Mājah (322).

⁽¹²⁾ Al-Bukhārī (6) and Muslim (2308).

⁽¹³⁾ [Al-Isrā’: 17/26-27].